

A prophet without honor



*Matthew 10:53-58; Mark
6:1-13*

Year B Proper 9

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	Simon - one of Jesus' brothers	▲			
■	James - one of Jesus' brothers	▲		▲	
●	Sister - one of Jesus' sisters	●			
▲	Mary - the mother of Jesus	▲		▲	
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲		▲
●	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts		▲		
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples		▲		▲
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲		▲
▲	Husband - a resident of Nazareth who's skeptical about Jesus' qualifications			▲	
▲	Wife - a resident of Nazareth who liked what Jesus preached, but defers to her husband's judgments			▲	
▲	Uncle - a know-it-all uncle of Mary's			■	
▲	Aunt - Mary's aunt, who is as skeptical of Jesus as her husband, but more compassionate toward Mary			▲	
▲	Jesus				▲

Scene 1

James , Mary , Simon , Sister

{At the home of Jesus's™ mother.}

Simon *[reporting good news]* Hey, guess what I heard in the market? Joshua's in town!

James Impossible!

Sister Why not?

James If he were in town, we'd have heard from him.

{Mary enters.}

Sister Mother, did you know Joshua was in town?

Mary Joshua? Here? Right now?

James *[skeptically]* According to Simon.

Simon I heard it at the market...

James *[disdainfully]* Market talk!

Simon ...from the leader of the synagogue!

Mary The rabbi said Joshua was in town?

Sister How did he know?

Simon This is the part you're not going to believe. He knew it because Joshua's going to be speaking there later today!

Mary At the synagogue?

James That's impossible! That's crazy!

Sister We have to go! We have to go hear him!

Mary *[to herself]* "This child will be for the rise and fall of many in Israel." Is this when it begins? Is the Day of the Lord upon us?

James Simon and I will go. But you and Ma should stay.

Simon Why just us?

James *[in a hissing whisper, intending only Simon to hear]* Because it's going to be a disaster! We can't let them see that!

Sister *[overhearing him]* Why would it be a disaster?

Simon Yeah, I think it's great that they asked him to speak. It's a great honor.

James But he has no training! He'll embarrass himself! He'll embarrass...

Mary *[quietly]* Us?

James *[in a more subdued voice]* Look, Ma, I've got nothing against Joshua. He's a nice guy and all, and he always tries to do his best, but he has no training at teaching the scriptures. And - and let's face it: he's just not good at anything!

Sister Maybe *this* is his calling. Maybe he's found it at last.

Simon I always thought that teaching might be his vocation. You probably never listened to him, but he had some pretty, well, *sage* things to say from time to time.

Mary *[quietly but firmly]* We'll go.

James Mother!

Mary *[more strongly]* We'll go. And perhaps you'll see a side of your brother you never saw before. Perhaps you'll see the hand of God at work for the nation!

Scene 2

John , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{Meanwhile, at the disciples' camp.}

Peter This is going to be great! Everything the rabbi's done is going to be small fry compared what he's going to do here!

Thomas What makes you think that?

Peter He's home! This is where he grew up! These are his people!

Thomas Why should that make a difference?

Peter It's like when some big outfit from up north tries to muscle in on the fishing in *our* waters. Do they really think they can work them better than we can? We sail circles around them, and send them home with empty holds.

Thomas *[to John]* Is that really how it goes down?

John Usually. It's tough to fish waters you don't really know.

Thomas So you're also optimistic about the rabbi's talk in the synagogue today?

John I am. He knows these people. He knows their needs and their fears and their hopes. And they know him. That can only help.

Thomas Well, even if he just does as well here as everywhere else so far, it'll be great.

John Yes, it's been amazing. When he raised that child from the dead last week? I thought I believed, but I never expected that!

Phillip I did! When we got word that she had died, I actually told someone in the crowd that the story wasn't finished yet! And then I go home for a visit and my parents start nagging me about how I'm wasting my life following the rabbi, and I clam up like I'm a little kid again.

Peter Dude! You should just stop going home. Cut that cord!

Thomas "Prophets are always honored - by everyone except their own people."

John Where'd you get that?

Thomas From myself.

Peter *[cheerfully]* That is totally the kind of thing you'd say!

Phillip I heard him say it to the rabbi just the other day.

John You said that to the rabbi just before we entered his home city? How did he reply?

Thomas He said, and I quote, "Too true."

Scene 3

Aunt , Husband , James , Mary , Uncle , Wife

{After Jesus' talk, his brother James has a chat with a couple in the crowd, while Mary chats with two relatives. Note: if you don't have six readers for this scene, you can easily double up parts that appear in each thread.}

{James and the couple.}

Husband Wasn't that your brother?

James Yeah, that was him.

Wife He's a remarkable speaker!

Husband *[skeptically]* You think so? Seriously?

Wife *[a little doubtfully]* Well, I thought some of the things he said were...well put.

James *[apologetically]* The family's actually pretty upset by all this. He didn't contact us at all, you know. Didn't give us any warning. Just showed up, back in town all of a sudden, and making like he was this great teacher!

Husband Some people!

Wife *[timidly]* Really, his teaching wasn't so bad at all. In fact...

Husband *[as if not even hearing her]* In fact, the more I think about it, the angrier I get, not just on your behalf, but on behalf of the whole town! Who does he think he is?

James I know! I feel terrible about this. If we had known he was going to try pulling something like this, we would have put a stop to it.

Wife How could you have stopped it?

James I don't know. We could have talked to the synagogue leader. Told him what was up.

Wife But he was the one who let your brother speak today. He must have approved of him.

Husband It's all about the donations for some of these people. He probably thought he could draw a big crowd for the return of the home town boy.

James He certainly did that. What a disaster!

Wife I still don't understand why it was such a disaster. His talk was really very good. Wasn't it?

{Mary and the relatives.}

Uncle Mary! We've been looking for you.

Mary Uncle Ezra. Aunt Lydia.

Aunt *[sympathetically]* Peace be with you, Mary. How are you holding up?

Mary Holding up?

Uncle *[angrily]* It's just disgraceful, what that boy has done to you!

Mary What has he done to me?

Aunt It's all right, Mary. You can be honest with us. We're family!

Uncle I've half a mind to give that boy a good thrashing. I knew something like this would come of the lad not having a father figure any more.

Mary *[patiently]* Now, uncle...

Aunt Ezra, you promised you would let this go.

Uncle Nobody ever explained to me why I should! Why a widow with six children shouldn't have jumped at the chance to marry one of the most successful merchants in Galilee. A man I've known since he was a child! A man who would have been the perfect match for her.

Aunt Mary didn't want another husband; it's as simple as that.

Uncle Yes, and now her firstborn son has gone off the deep end!

{James and the couple.}

Wife *[timidly]* Do you really feel what he said today was so terrible?

Husband How could it be anything else? He's just a kid from the neighborhood! He hasn't had any education or training. Isn't that right?

James Totally. That's exactly what I would have told him myself if I had gotten in to see him in time.

Husband People should stick to what they know!

James But you know the tragic thing? He isn't even very good at that!

Wife What was his training?

James Carpentry.

Husband I thought I recognized you. You're Joseph's sons, aren't you?

James Yes, sir!

Wife My condolences on your father's passing. He was a wonderful man.

Husband And an excellent carpenter.

James Thanks. We've tried to carry on the business, and we're doing a pretty good job of it, too, but Joshua was always hopeless!

Husband There's always one runt in every litter.

James He was strong enough to do the work, just not...skilled. At all! Always splitting boards and bending nails. He was clumsy at everything! *[getting warmed up to the subject]* He used to burn the bread and put lumps in the gravy every time he tried to help our mother cook. And asking him to set the table was to guarantee at least one broken bowl!

Wife Well, maybe it's just as well he found another calling. I really...enjoyed some of what he said.

{Mary and the relatives.}

Mary *[with quiet indignity]* My son has *not* "gone off the deep end!"

Aunt *[in a scolding voice]* Ezra! *[in a compassionate tone to Mary]* I apologize for him. He's being as rude as ever. But it's out of concern for you. We both love you, and want the best for you.

Uncle That's all I'm saying.

Mary *[carefully]* I appreciate your concern.

Uncle How about this? How about if I have a little chat with the boy? He's basically a good boy. He just needs some straight talk, man to man.

Mary [*coolly*] About what?

Uncle About his path in life. About his future. Maybe I can persuade him to give carpentry another go. [*suddenly excited*] Or better yet: Nathan is looking for apprentices! He could train him up in the business!

Aunt [*angrily frustrated*] You're breaking your promise again!

Uncle Now, now: I only promised not to mention him again as a husband for Mary. And I won't - any more. Now I'm proposing that he give Joshua a job! A *real* job, doing real work.

Mary [*firmly*] Joshua *has* a job! Doing the most important work there is: God's work. In fact... [*tails off, not wanting to reveal the whole truth about Jesus and what he is*]

Aunt What, dear?

Mary [*in a more subdued, but still firm voice*] He's so much more than even a teacher. He's going to...to do great things for Israel, for all the nations! You'll see. Soon, you'll see his power and then you'll know!

Uncle "His power?" You don't believe his claim to be able to heal the sick, do you?

Mary He's already healed a few people just during his stay here!

Uncle Sure. That's what his followers were saying earlier. But did anybody actually see it?

Aunt I heard he raised a girl from the dead in the last town he was at.

Uncle Probably more stories planted by those followers. Or gullible townsfolk spreading rumors.

Mary I saw him turn water into wine with my own eyes! At Simon's wedding!

Aunt I heard about that. But what I heard was that they found a cache of good wine they didn't know they had as the party was winding down.

Uncle Exactly. And the already drunk guests thought they were seeing a miracle.

Mary I know what I saw!

Aunt Look! He's coming out again. I didn't think he would. *[in quiet wonder]* He's really going to try healing people. Can he do it?

Mary Now you'll see! Now you'll see his power!

Uncle *[condescendingly]* All right, Mary. We'll see what he does. And then, hopefully, the matter will be settled.

Scene 4

Jesus , John , Peter , Phillip

{After the healing session, during which Jesus was not able to heal anybody, he and the disciples trudge back to their camp.}

Peter I don't understand it, rabbi. What happened?

{A long pause, during which Jesus doesn't reply.}

Phillip I don't understand that crowd. I don't even know how to describe it. We've had crowds that were against us before, but this was different. "Angry" isn't the right word.

John "Dismissive." The crowd was dismissive. Like they weren't even taking the rabbi seriously.

Peter That was it exactly! It made me so mad!

Phillip The weird thing is, the sermon went really well - I heard some really good feedback as soon as it ended - but then things somehow changed.

Peter *[angrily]* It was those jokers who said they knew him when he was a kid, making their stupid jokes. I wanted to punch them all in the face!

John I felt sorry for the sick folks. They came hoping to be healed, and they were respectful the whole time. *[timidly]* Rabbi, couldn't you have helped them in spite of the crowd?

Jesus *[tightly, after a pause]* Never before have I seen such a lack of faith!

Peter Those people didn't deserve to see any healings!

Phillip Except for the rabbi's mother, of course.

John She was there?

Phillip Yeah, along with some other members of the family.

Peter Hey, I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to meet them. *[to Jesus]* Did you know they were there?

Jesus *[tightly, after a pause]* I was aware of them.

John *[to Jesus]* Did you get a chance to talk to them afterward? I hope they weren't very disappointed when...you know.

{A pause, during which Jesus does not reply.}

Phillip *[timidly]* I think she was pretty bummed. His mother, I mean. I didn't speak with her, but she looked so excited when we came back out for the healings, but then when, you know, when the rabbi couldn't heal anybody, her face just fell.

Peter *[with fake cheer]* Hey, that's all right. Mothers are always disappointed, right?

John I guess Thomas was right. I'm sure things will go better in the next town. Maybe we could invite your family to see you there.

Jesus *[abruptly]* No! We're changing our plans. I'm sending you out. All of you, two by two. You'll preach the word, and heal the sick, and cast out demons. You *will* have the power. You'll take nothing with you but a staff: no food, no baggage, no money. You'll stay where you're welcomed, and shake off the dust of the places that reject you as a witness against them on that Day.

Phillip *[totally discombobulated]* Uh...where...where should we go?

Jesus Anywhere! Except your home towns!

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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